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Missouri Women in Political Life, 1972-1993

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The Golden Lane, St. Louis, 1916

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MISSOURI WOMEN IN Political Life, 1972-1993

by Candace O'Connor

Across the United States, newspaper headlines proclaimed 1992 "the Year of the Woman" in national politics. More women ran for political office than ever before; 47 won seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, while four were newly elected to the Senate. In state legislatures nationwide, 20.4 percent of the seats went to women, along with 22 percent of statewide elected offices.

The Missouri elections reflected these national trends. Amid a series of stunning primary upsets, a record number of women—90 in all—won nominations in legislative, congressional and statewide races. In the November election, there were many victories, mingled with some disappointing losses. But overall, women emerged with 37 out of 197 legislative seats—the largest number they had ever held.

Political analysts attribute these gains to many factors. The candidates themselves worked tirelessly on the campaign trail and developed shrewd new ways to raise funds or garner endorsements. Behind the scenes, women's groups such as the Missouri Women's Political Caucus, the Missouri Women's Network, and abortion rights and pro-life organizations played pivotal roles in recruiting, training and supporting female candidates. An intangible factor—the mood of the electorate—was also at work, with voters turning to women as a new brand of political leader.

Despite the excitement of last November, though, the real story in Missouri is not simply the gains and losses of one election year. The successes of that election represent the culmination of a struggle for political power that has been gaining momentum across the state for at least the past 20 years. In growing numbers, women have been seeking and winning office. And once in power, they have been shaping policy, sponsoring key legislation and

heading legislative committees or holding cabinet posts once considered strictly male territory.

The contrast between 1972 and 1992 is striking. Studies by the Center for the American Woman and Politics (CAWP), part of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University, show that Missouri had 44 women candidates for statewide posts in 1972—less than half the number running 20 years later. After the 1972 election, women made up exactly five percent of the state legislature, with ten in the House and Mary Gant (D-Kansas City)—the first woman ever—in the Senate. But that was less than one-third the number who hold office in 1993.

Women have made substantial progress on other fronts as well. In 1972, no Missouri cabinet officer had ever been a woman; in 1993, there were four. In 1972, no woman had ever served on the circuit trial bench, the Missouri Court of Appeals or the state Supreme Court; in 1993, Ann K. Covington became chief justice of the Missouri Supreme Court. In 1972, no Missouri woman had run for governor, served as state executive officer, run for the U.S. Senate or been elected lieutenant governor. Although DeVerne Calloway, a Democrat from St. Louis, had served in the Missouri House since 1962, no black woman had yet been elected to the Senate. Since 1972, however, all those posts have been held or sought by women.

In the past two decades, Missouri women have also claimed a place on legislative committees once considered the province of men. In 1993, Rep. Karen McCarthy (D-Kansas City) heads the powerful Ways and Means Committee, while Rep. Kathleen Steele (D-Kirksville) chairs Science, Technology and Critical Issues. Reps. Sheila Lumpe (D-University City), Carole Roper Park (D-Sugar Creek), and Gracia Y. Backer (D-New Bloomfield), who is also assistant majority leader in the House, head important appropriations subcommittees. Rep. Sue Shear (D-Clayton)

chairs a House and Senate Statutory Joint Committee on Correctional Institutions. Rep. Mary Groves Bland (D-Kansas City) chairs the Public Safety and Health Committee; Rep. May Scheve (D-St. Louis), secretary for the Democratic caucus, is also vice chair of Energy and Environment.

Other women have focused on more traditional issues, with notable success. After years of work, Rep. Kaye Steinmetz (D-Florissant), chair of the Children, Youth and Families Committee, successfully sponsored legislation in the 1993 session to regulate church-run day care centers, strengthen child-support enforcement and set up a family court system. Rep. Annette Morgan (D-Kansas City), chair of the Education Committee, sponsored the new \$310 million school-aid package that included provisions for educational reform.

And Missouri women are making their mark on national politics as well. Like Sen. Irene Treppler (R-Mattese) and Rep. Gladys Marriott (D-Kansas City) before her, Rep. Bonnie Sue Cooper (R-Kansas City) was elected president of the National Order of Women Legislators; Rep. McCarthy will serve as the first woman president of the National Conference of State Legislators in 1994. Former lieutenant governor Harriett Woods is now president of the National Women's Political Caucus and national chair of the Coalition for Women's Appointments.

Yet despite some vivid successes, the 20-year record of women in statewide politics is not solely a story of progress. On the roster of states, Missouri is far from a leader in giving a place to women in politics. CAWP figures show that, early in 1992, Missouri ranked 24th in the number of female legislators, but slipped to 29th place after the November election. In the state Senate, women have never held more than three of the 34 seats at any one time; in 1993, the lone female member is Sen. Irene Treppler, since Sen. Pat Danner (D-Smithville) was elected to Congress.

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Virginia Minor



Phoebe Couzins



Annie White Baxter



Marie Ruoff Byrum



Melcene Smith



Sarah Lucille Turner



Emma Knell



Georgia Daniel Irvine



Leonor Kretzer Sullivan

And at times women legislators have been sharply divided among themselves, particularly in battles over the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and abortion rights—both issues that have dominated legislative debate over the past two decades. In 1972, after House approval two years earlier, the U.S. Senate voted to accept the ERA, thus setting the stage for ratification battles in state legislatures across the country. And in October 1972, the U.S. Supreme Court was hearing arguments in a new abortion rights case, *Roe v. Wade*; three months later, the Court's landmark decision in the case touched off a firestorm of national controversy.

Overall, though, Missouri women have been making steady, impressive gains on the political scene. Once community activists and campaign workers, they have moved into the political mainstream as judges, legislators, state executives and cabinet officials. At the district and county level, they are filling hundreds of official slots. Still, women represent 53 percent of the population, and political parity may seem far away. But women have come a long way since 1972 and their role in statewide politics is certain to grow in the future.

The First Century Women Who Led the Way

In a limited space, it is impossible to tell the complete story of women in Missouri politics. So many women have served in office, worked behind the scenes, raised important public issues or lobbied for key legislation that it is difficult to name them all.

A discussion of Missouri women in state politics, however, must begin with a look at those 19th-century suffragists who paved the way through their valiant efforts to win the vote. Missouri had an active suffrage movement; in 1867, the Missouri Woman Suffrage Association formed in St. Louis. A founder of the organization and its first president was Virginia Minor, who declared at an 1872 suffrage convention held in St. Louis that "the Constitution of the United States gives me every right and privilege to which every other citizen is entitled."

That October, she put her views to a test and tried to register to vote. When St. Louis County election officials turned her away, Minor and her husband, a lawyer, filed suit—and took their case all

the way to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1875. But the Court ruled unanimously against the Minors: Women were citizens, but not all citizens could vote; the political rights of women were controlled by their individual states. Securing the right to vote would require a constitutional amendment.

Other Missouri women carried on the suffrage fight. Phoebe Couzins, the first female graduate of Washington University School of Law in 1871, lectured on women's rights and helped found the National Woman Suffrage Association. A stirring speaker, she first appeared before the Missouri legislature in 1869 to lobby for passage of voting rights legislation. Seven years later, she spoke at the Democratic National Convention on behalf of women's rights. In 1887, she became the first woman ever named a U.S. marshal when she was appointed to the Eastern District of Missouri.

Meanwhile, other Missouri women were following the more traditional role of supporting politician-husbands. Julia Dent, a St. Louis native, married Ulysses S. Grant in 1848, and in 1869 accompanied the successful Civil War general to the White House, where he served two terms as president.

But despite the bonds of law and convention, women soon began stepping into the political arena themselves. In 1890, Annie White Baxter, a Democrat from Carthage, won election from an all-male electorate as Jasper County clerk. Her victory, by 438-vote plurality, marked the first time that a Missouri woman had won public office. Her opponent filed a legal challenge, claiming that a woman could not hold office, but the courts rejected his argument—and her election stood. From 1908 to 1916, Baxter also served as registrar of lands for Missouri.

In June 1916, St. Louis hosted the Democratic Convention that nominated Woodrow Wilson for a second term as president. Suffragists from around the state and nation converged on the city and staged a silent protest along a 10-block route leading to the convention hall. Seven thousand strong, they waved yellow banners and wore yellow sashes or streamers; their demonstration became known as the "Golden Lane."

St. Louisan Edna F. Gellhorn, a board member of the St. Louis Equal Suffrage Association, helped to organize the Golden Lane demonstration. In 1919, when the National Suffrage Association held its Jubilee Convention in St. Louis,

she planned and directed the meeting; later she became a national vice president of the League of Women Voters.

Helen Guthrie Miller, a Columbia resident, continued to fight for the vote in 1919 when she spoke to the Missouri Democratic Convention on women's suffrage; she was the first woman asked to speak to a Missouri political party. In 1920, the persistence of these suffragists paid off, with the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution which finally granted women the right to vote. On August 31, 1920, Marie Ruoff Byrum of Hannibal became the first woman voter in the state of Missouri.

In 1919, the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs was founded in St. Louis; the St. Joseph local was also founded in the same year. In coming years, the nonpartisan BPW/USA and its Missouri organization, established in 1921 in Moberly, would become an effective lobby for women's issues.

Slowly the floodgates began to open, admitting more women to the political scene. Mayme Ousley, a St. James Republican, waged a tough campaign and became Missouri's first woman mayor in 1921. In the meantime, two women—Mellcene Smith (St. Louis) and Sarah Lucille Turner (Kansas City)—were elected to the House in 1922 for single terms. Smith sponsored 11 bills, six of which became law. Turner, a lawyer, was the first woman to serve as acting speaker of the House in 1923.

Other women moved forward. Emily Newell Blair, a Joplin native, was a well-known suffragist who served as the first woman vice president of the Democratic National Committee in 1922. Later she criss-crossed the United States, organizing Democratic women's clubs; she was also named chair of the Consumer's Advisory Board of the National Recovery Act and head of the Women's Army Corps.

The third female legislator and the first Republican to win election was Emma Knell, a funeral director from Carthage, who took office in 1924 and served for three terms. An active legislator, she co-sponsored a bill that created the Missouri Highway Patrol system and introduced another bill that required every Missouri school to fly the American flag.

In the 1930s and 40s, women with legal credentials began to take office. Springfield attorney Gladys Berger Stewart, previously a judge for the 31st circuit, served

in the legislature from 1934 to 1942, where she sponsored a bill giving women the right to serve on juries. While in office, she once remarked: "There isn't any such thing as the woman's viewpoint. Intelligence doesn't have any sex." In 1966, at age 67, she was appointed Douglas County probate and *ex officio* magistrate judge.

Mayce Jones Maness, a Ripley County lawyer and well-known figure in state Democratic politics, succeeded her husband in the legislature for a single term beginning in 1940. Next she plunged into county politics, becoming the state's first elected female prosecuting attorney. At age 70, she took her seat as Ripley County probate judge, won election twice more to the post and retired with associate circuit status.

New parts of the state began sending women to Jefferson City. In 1942, Georgia Daniel Irvine, a Democrat, took office as the first female representative from Audrain County; she co-sponsored legislation allowing civilian voters within the United States to cast absentee ballots during elections. In the same year, Mabel Aeschliman became the first Republican elected from Schuyler County since the Civil War.

Missouri women also were taking their place in national political life. In 1933, Nellie Ross, a Democrat and St. Joseph native, was appointed director of the U.S. Mint, which she headed for 20 years. When Harry S. Truman became president of the United States in 1945 and won election in 1948, Bess Wallace Truman was at his side as first lady.

During the 1950s, the most exciting leap forward for Missouri women came in 1952 when Leonor Kretzer Sullivan, a St. Louis Democrat, captured the third district seat in the U.S. Congress previously held by her late husband. During her 24 years in office, she became known for her support of consumer rights, especially in product labeling and meat inspection; she was the principal author of the 1968 Consumer Credit Protection Act. In the mid-1950s, Sullivan waged a five-year battle to win approval for a plan, which finally became law in 1959, to distribute government surplus foods to the needy.

A lifelong fan of the Mississippi River, Sullivan promoted the St. Louis port, flood control projects and river safety bills. She was also the driving force behind legislation that supported construction of the Jefferson National Expan-

sion Memorial on the riverfront, and in 1983 St. Louis honored her by renaming Wharf Street the "Leonor K. Sullivan Boulevard."

In state politics, the 1950s saw a record number of women—11 in 1954—running for statewide posts. That year there was also progress on the judicial side when Margaret Young of St. Joseph, already the first woman assistant attorney general in Missouri, became the first female lawyer elected to the state judiciary; she served as Buchanan County magistrate judge from 1954 to 1974. In 1955, Marybelle Mueller of Cape Girardeau County was appointed interim magistrate judge, then won election as probate judge in 1956 and from 1974 through 1986.

Increasingly, organizations such as the League of Women Voters, founded in 1920, took strong positions on state and federal issues. In Missouri, the League would target campaign finance reform and improved voter access, routinely aiding voter registration, organizing voter information meetings and planning candidate forums. It began supporting legislation to promote energy conservation, monitor hazardous waste and preserve natural resources.

Some League members found clever ways to move along important legislation. For several years, state board member Mildred Decker of Columbia had urged passage of a bill to get the names of deceased voters off the voting roles, but she had always seen the measure die in committee. Finally, in 1951, she invited the press to attend one committee meeting, held in the wee hours of Sunday morning—and the group quickly voted to send the bill to the floor.

The American Association of University Women (AAUW), founded in Missouri in 1921, also became a vocal presence on the state level. At its 1951 state convention, for example, the AAUW went on record as urging its branches to help end segregation in public schools. Throughout the rest of the decade, women in AAUW branches across Missouri worked to support mental health and schools appropriations, revise child welfare laws and establish a Missouri law requiring equal pay for equal work.

The role of AAUW continued into the next decade, with the help of such women as Dr. Sara Feder, a University of Missouri-Columbia professor and former president of the Columbia

branch, who became state legislative chair for the group in 1960. Three years later a bill, written by Dr. Feder and passed by the Missouri legislature, called for equal pay for female employees. She also served as Missouri's representative to the June 1964 Conference of Governors' Commissions on the Status of Women.

At the 1961 session of the Missouri House, a familiar figure in state politics took on a highly visible new role. Agnes I. Moore, a Democrat from Ste. Genevieve County who was elected state representative in 1956 and 1958, became the first woman named chief clerk of the House. Moore, known affectionately as "the Mother of the House," retired in 1976.

The 1962 election ushered in a new era in Missouri politics when the first African-American woman, DeVerne Lee Calloway, won a seat in the House from the 13th district. As a child in Memphis, Tennessee, she used to steal the "For Colored Only" signs that were posted around town. Much later, in the Missouri legislature, she became known as a champion of civil rights. "All my life I have been trying to take down the 'For Colored Only' signs," she said.

During two decades in office, she was an eloquent advocate of social welfare reform, of urban areas, of state aid for public education. She helped pass legislation that made Harris-Stowe Teachers College a state college, and she served on the school's board of regents. A crusader for reproductive rights for women, she was the unsuccessful co-sponsor in 1970 of a bill designed to reform Missouri's abortion law. In 1974, she chaired a committee that uncovered inhumane living conditions for prisoners at the Missouri State Penitentiary; a resulting lawsuit led to construction of the medium-security prison at Pacific. She retired in 1982.

The 1960s also saw dramatic new changes on the national political scene. Women attending a conference on the status of women, angry at sex-based discrimination, formed the National Organization of Women (NOW) in 1966. The group said it hoped to "break through the silken curtain of prejudice and discrimination against women in government."

Each year, Missouri elections also reflected steady progress for women. In 1964, 19 ran for statewide posts. And two years later, a talented new group of wom-

en, including Reps. Edna Eads (R-Bonne Terre), Mary Gant (D-Kansas City), Jewell Kennedy (R-Raytown), Gladys Marriott (D-Kansas City) and Dorothy Meagher (D-St. Louis) took their seats in the House.

Most had acquired their interest in politics by campaigning for other candidates, by confronting local issues or by working their way up through county committees. Gladys Marriott, for example, who became Democratic Caucus secretary and chair of the House Retirement Committee, got her start in civic affairs. Jewell Kennedy, who worked to win tax relief for the elderly and passage of a no-fault divorce law, had been politically active for ten years and had served as Republican committeewoman.

The 1970s

A New Day in Politics

Within a few years, other women were coming to the state legislature after working with spouses who died in office. In 1970, Orchid I. Jordan, a Kansas City Democrat, won election after her husband, powerful black leader Rep. Leon Jordan, was murdered. As she said then, "I want to do everything I can to make Leon's dream of dignity, equality, justice and freedom a reality." During her 16 years in office, Orchid Jordan regularly sponsored legislation for transit-system taxes; in 1984, she won 81 percent of the vote in her district.

A special 1971 election gave Judith G. O'Connor, a Democrat from North St. Louis County, the seat left vacant when her husband was killed in an auto accident on his way to the House. She won re-election in her own right the following year.

With the 1972 election, a new era dawned in national politics. Shirley Chisholm ran for president; at the Democratic National Convention, Frances "Sissy" Farenthold was nominated vice-presidential running mate for George McGovern. U.S. Congresswoman Martha Griffiths (D-Michigan), a native of Pierce City who earned a bachelor of arts degree in 1934 from the University of Missouri, had managed to pry the Equal Rights Amendment out of the House Judiciary Committee, where it had long been stalled. After a herculean effort by women's organizations, the U.S. Senate passed the ERA by a vote of 84 to 8. Despite this progress, the Center for the

American Woman and Politics estimated that women still held only 5 percent of state legislative seats nationwide.

Missouri women sensed the change in political climate. The pool of 26 candidates for statewide office in 1970 grew to 44 women running in 1972. After the November election, seven female incumbents and three newcomers were seated in the House—ten women alongside 153 men. Among those elected were two Republicans: Irene Treppler from the 106th district, and Mildred Huffman, a St. Louis Republican from the 91st district, who had earlier been the first woman elected St. Louis County clerk.

Another newly elected representative was Sue Shear, a Clayton Democrat who had been involved in a host of community organizations, including the League of Women Voters and the Council of Jewish Women. In 1971, the National Women's Political Caucus (WPC) had formed in Washington, D.C., to help women take their place in American political life. On February 12, 1972, the Missouri WPC held its first statewide meeting, planned by Doris Quinn of Kansas City and Betty Cook Rottmann of Columbia. The following November, Sue Shear became the first woman recruited and supported by the WPC to win a House seat.

The 1972 election marked another first for women when Rep. Mary Gant, then a three-term representative, was elected by an overwhelming margin to serve as Missouri's first female state senator. Newspaper articles heralded her arrival in the 34-member Senate with headlines that read: "Move Over, Gentlemen; Mrs. Gant has arrived." During her campaign, she supported laws that mandated equal pay for equal work, opposed the Equal Rights Amendment and liberalized abortion laws.

While some women made headlines, others took new places with little fanfare. After 20 years of state government service, Vinita Ramsey was named secretary to the state Senate. For a decade, until her death in 1982, she was in charge of a small staff that kept the daily Journal of the Senate and performed other administrative functions.

This new band of legislators meant a new wave of legislation sponsored by women. In 1973, working together with Rep. Wayne Goode (D-Normandy), Sue Shear recruited women law students from Washington University to research discriminatory language and practices in

Missouri statutes. From this research, supported by the League of Women Voters, came her initial package of 35 bills, the first skirmish in her continuing campaign to make Missouri laws "sex-neutral."

The first round in another battle also took place in 1973: the fight over state ratification of the ERA. Like their male colleagues, women legislators began lining up on both sides of the question: Mary Gant led the opposition, while Sue Shear was House sponsor of the amendment. This time, the House defeated the ERA by a vote of 70 to 81.

In less visible legislation, Winnie Weber, a Democratic representative from House Springs, successfully sponsored a bill requiring a course in the psychology and education of the exceptional child for a teaching certificate. Margaret Miller, a Republican state representative from the 145th district, passed a measure abolishing the office of county superintendent of schools in counties of a certain size.

A distinguished attorney in Republican politics was also named to the bench in 1973. Hazel Palmer of Sedalia, who had been president of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs from 1956 to 1958 and who had also been the Republican nominee for the U.S. Senate in 1958, was appointed to fill a vacancy as Pettis County magistrate judge. The following year she was elected to the post in her own right, then re-elected in 1978, and raised to associate circuit judge in 1979. She retired in 1982 at age 79.

In 1974, 36 women ran for the top five statewide executive positions nationwide, while 1,100 women campaigned to become state legislators. Following the national trend, Missouri had a record number of candidates—54 in all—running for statewide posts.

After serving two terms as state representative, Winnie Weber was on the campaign trail to become the second female state senator. Women, she had said in a 1973 speech, "have the brains and the ability that government needs." Her own platform included support for capital punishment, along with opposition to abortion and the ERA. In the primary, she was defeated by only 56 votes.

The Missouri Women's Political Caucus was also hard at work in this election to promote candidates who favored passage of the ERA. In 1974, the group helped elect three new women as state

representatives—Dotty Doll, Della Hadley and Doris Quinn, all Democrats from Kansas City—who were strong ERA supporters.

Those new votes were essential in 1975 when the second round of the ERA battle took place, with pro-ERA forces feverishly trying to solidify a block of support in the face of strong opposition. Finally, the House approved the ERA by the minimum number of votes necessary for its passage, an 82-to-75 vote majority. But in the Senate, the amendment failed on a vote of 14-to-20.

In 1976, a Missouri woman became the first named to an ambassador's post when Rosemary L. Ginn, a lawyer from Columbia, was appointed ambassador to Luxembourg. A member of the Republican National Committee since 1960, she had spent many years in government service, most recently as chair of the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO.

During the election that fall, 60 women were candidates for statewide office, though some were unsuccessful. Mildred Huffman, by then a two-term Republican state representative, failed in her bid to become the first female secretary of state. A Democrat and consumer advocate from Clayton, Alberta Slavin, did not succeed in winning nomination for lieutenant governor; in 1977, she was named to the Missouri Public Service Commission. During the campaign, she was quoted as saying, "I don't believe Missouri is ready for a statewide woman candidate."

But a new class of women legislators won election to the House. Among them were three Democrats—Kaye Steinmetz of Florissant, Karen McCarthy of Kansas City, Carole Roper Park of Sugar Creek—and Republican Marion Cairns of Webster Groves. Fourteen women and 149 men were now state representatives.

On the Senate side, a powerful new voice was added to Missouri political life with the election of Harriett Woods as Missouri's second female state senator. Strongly in favor of the ERA, she also campaigned on a platform of support for revision of the state's tax structure, including statewide reassessment of property tax and better methods of collection. The resulting new funds would help pay for education and services for the elderly, she said.

In 1977, Woods led pro-ERA forces in the Senate, while Missouri's other woman senator, Mary Gant, became the amendment's most prominent oppo-

nent. "When we wanted to give equal treatment without regard to race we wrote it into the Constitution," Woods was quoted as saying, "and when we want to give equal treatment without regard to sex, we must write that into the Constitution, too." Gant argued that equality for women was already guaranteed by the Constitution.

State ratification of the ERA gained special significance because of events taking place on a national level, where Indiana became the 35th state to ratify the ERA. Three more states were needed to approve the ERA before it could become the 27th Amendment to the Constitution. In Missouri, public pressure was mounting on both sides of the issue. A vocal "Stop ERA" movement was arrayed against several groups that favored ERA passage; among them was the Missouri ERA Coalition, part of a national organization representing some 65 organizations—the League of Women Voters, AAUW, the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, NOW and WPC, among others.

The Missouri vote was also affected by the outcome of special elections held in February 1977. Doris Quinn, a one-term state representative, ran as an independent in one special Senate election. Founder and former president of the MWPC, she was an outspoken ERA supporter who hoped to provide a strong pro-ERA voice in the Senate. Her bid failed; however, she continued to press for ERA passage as president of the Missouri ERA Coalition.

But when the ERA came to a vote, it lost in the Senate by a margin of 12 to 22. In fact, the ERA's 1977 defeat spelled an end to its supporters' hopes for passage in Missouri. Despite attempts that continued through 1982, the ERA would not come to the Senate floor for another vote—and Missouri would become one of 15 states that did not ratify the ERA.

After the ERA debate, other important issues began to emerge during the 1977 session. Though their measure did not become law, Reps. Sue Shear and DeVerne Calloway developed a "displaced homemakers" bill to counsel and train women suddenly forced to seek employment.

And that December, a strong new member was added to the Senate when civil rights activist Gwen B. Giles was elected to fill an unexpired term; she became the first African-American

woman to serve as a state senator. Within months of her election, one newspaper commented that Giles had already "shown signs of gutsiness, occasionally challenging the ruling power bloc on issues that could affect the state aid for her North Side district."

Another black woman—Leah Brock McCartney of St. Louis—also broke new ground in 1977 when she took her place on the Missouri Public Service Commission. A lawyer, she was also the first woman to serve as municipal judge of record in Missouri.

In March 1978, there were 14 women among 163 legislators in the House; three of 34 in the Senate. In a story published in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, the women also talked candidly about the problems they faced in office. "We're considered light-headed and fun to tease, but not all that bright," said Rep. Della Hadley. Rep. Judith O'Connor described an incident that occurred when she was a freshman representative. She was meeting with three senior members to talk about her first bill when one, apparently as a joke, locked the door, turned off the light and asked just how serious she was about her legislation.

In the same article, both Hadley and Sen. Gant, then chair of the powerful Senate Banking Committee, said that they found behind-the-scenes work—both discussions with colleagues and committee work—more important than floor debate. But some of the women added that they often felt excluded when male colleagues got together in the evenings for a drink and made decisions with no women around.

And most of the women interviewed said that, along with their heavy legislative workload, they had to shoulder the extra burden of keeping households running and spending time with their families. "It's a very time-consuming job," said Rep. Karen McCarthy. "Even when I'm home, the phone rings constantly."

Despite the difficulties of the job, these women were winning respect from other legislators and from the public. In July 1978, the *Columbia Daily Tribune* rated Sen. Harriett Woods as one of "the ten best legislators" of the 79th General Assembly. Skilled in floor debate, she had also successfully sponsored a bill that exempted prescription drugs and prosthetic and orthopedic devices from the state sales tax.

Later that year, the number of women



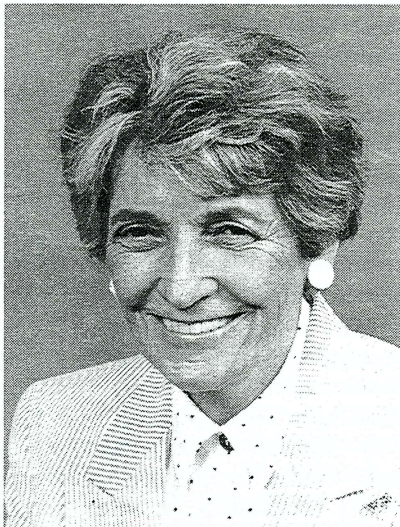
DeVerne Calloway



Mary Gant



Judith O'Connor



Sue Shear



Mildred Huffman



Harriett Woods



Kaye Steinmetz



Gwen Giles



Betty Cooper Hearnese

running for office continued to rise. In the November 1978 election, Missouri fielded 66 candidates for statewide posts. Sandra Lee Reeves, a Democrat from Kansas City, was one of those elected to the House; another was the third African-American woman to serve as a Missouri legislator: Billie Boykins, a Democrat from St. Louis.

On the judicial side, Ann Quill Neiderlander, a St. Louis attorney for 40 years, was named magistrate judge for the 21st judicial circuit in St. Louis County. She was the first woman state court judge to serve full-time in a metropolitan area.

Early in 1979, Betty Cooper Hearnese—a familiar figure in Missouri politics—was once again back in the limelight. From 1965 to 1973, she had been the state's first lady while her husband, Warren E. Hearnese, served as governor. This time, she had won election in her own right as Democratic state representative from the 160th district in Mississippi County.

During the 1979 session, women legislators created or sponsored a variety of new legislation. Sen. Mary Gant successfully sponsored two bills related to property tax reassessment and senior citizen relief. Rep. Gladys Marriott saw two of her bills passed that related to insurance benefits for state employees and retirement plan benefits for public officials. In her successful "Good Samaritan" bill, Rep. Irene Treppner gave medical personnel immunity from civil liability after administering emergency care at the scene of an accident.

After chairing a Senate committee that investigated health-care problems in nursing homes, Sen. Harriett Woods sponsored the state Omnibus Nursing Home Act, a major revision of the laws governing the rights and responsibilities of nursing home owners. The bill, called by a newspaper "one of the nation's finest such laws," led to more stringent rules for nursing homes and a "bill of rights" for patients.

As it had before, the abortion issue came once again before the General Assembly. In 1975, the Missouri legislature had been the first in the U.S. to petition Congress for a constitutional ban on abortions. Since then, it had repeatedly tried to enact restrictions on abortion, but most had been overturned by the courts.

After a long, sometimes bitter debate, in which women legislators lined up on both sides of the issue, a new measure

regulating abortions won approval from the legislature in 1979. The bill, sponsored by Rep. Judith O'Connor, contained two key requirements: that a woman under 18 years old obtain either written parental consent or court consent for an abortion; and that any woman considering an abortion be provided with specific information, including an anatomical description of the fetus at the time of abortion. Like previous laws, this one was later declared unconstitutional by the courts.

At the end of the decade, changes were stirring for women who wanted a louder voice in Missouri political life. A new organization, the Women's Register for Leadership, was founded by Marcia Mellitz of St. Louis, aided by Betty Cook Rottmann and Ella Bettinger, both of the AAUW: Sandra Eveloff of Kansas City; Sue Clancy of the Junior League; Agnes Garino of the League of Women Voters; and Sally Barker, attorney. The goal of the group was to place more women in positions of statewide leadership; they tracked available jobs, published directories of positions on boards and commissions and created a bank of women candidates.

The 1980s A Decade of Growth

As a new decade began, women were clearly playing a more prominent role in national political life. Statistics gathered by CAWP showed that more women than ever were running for office; the number of women elected to state legislatures across the country had more than doubled in ten years. This trend would continue over the next few years, with women moving into legislative leadership positions and state cabinet posts, especially those related to health and social services.

But studies also showed that Missouri was below average in women's participation in government. No woman had ever been elected to statewide executive office. Just suggesting that a woman should run, said Rep. Gladys Marriott in an interview, was guaranteed to produce blank stares. "At first they are interested, then they are in total shock that someone would broach the subject."

At a time when the national average was 12 percent, state women held 437—or eight percent—of the statewide elected, legislative, county and municipal posts. Missouri had no women in its

delegation to the United States Congress at a time when the national average was three percent. Although in line with the average national percentage of female legislators, Missouri had only 397 women—or 11 percent—among its 4,751 municipal officials, compared to a national figure of 13 percent.

Still, a few Missouri women were moving into new leadership positions. Paula V. Smith, director of the Missouri Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, was one of two women serving in the cabinet of Governor Christopher Bond; the other was Shaila Aery, promoted from deputy commissioner to commissioner of higher education in 1982.

During the 1980 session, Missouri's 22 women legislators pressed ahead with successful new bills. A measure from Rep. Billie Boykins broadened Aid to Families with Dependent Children benefits for families with an unemployed parent, while another bill from Rep. DeVerne Calloway authorized free transportation for some St. Louis schoolchildren. Sen. Mary Gant developed a bill that covered adult abuse by a household member, while Sen. Harriett Woods designed protective services for the elderly.

That year, the group of women legislators lost two members when Reps. Della Hadley and Dotty Doll—both three-term representatives from Kansas City—announced they would not run again. Hadley was an outspoken member of the Education Committee, and Doll a vice-chair of the Urban Affairs Committee and member of Appropriations; one Kansas City newspaper called their departures "a severe blow to Kansas City" due to their "strong and positive impact on constructive legislation."

Other setbacks came during the November election. Sen. Mary Gant, three-term state representative and two-term state senator, lost in her re-election bid; she later took over as chair of the State Board of Mediation. An African-American candidate, Donna R. White of St. Louis, failed to win the Republican primary in the secretary of state's race. Four candidates—Elsa D. Hill, a one-term state representative elected in 1966 who was running for the 1st district; Stella Sollars, Republican from the 5th district; Ann Kutscher, Democrat from the 8th district; and Janice Noland, a lawyer and Republican from the 8th district—also lost their bids for seats in the U.S. Congress.

Although the number of women candidates had been increasing each year, the total dropped this time to a disappointing 62. Republican women were principally affected; fewer ran in 1980 than in the previous four elections. Political analysts ascribed the decline to general political apathy, to career demands that left women little time for political life or resolution of the ERA issue in 1980. Others said that some women could not run for office because they lacked money both from their political parties and from women contributors.

Despite their smaller numbers, women scored several important victories in the November election. In the Senate, Harriett Woods won re-election. In the House, six new women were elected, joining 12 who were returning. The freshmen included two Kansas City Democrats—Annette Morgan, who replaced Dotty Doll in the 29th District, and Mary Groves Bland, who beat an eight-term incumbent in the 30th House District—and two St. Louis Democrats, Sheila Lumpe and Eileen McCann. Among the Republican newcomers were Donna Coleman of St. Louis County and Jean Mathews of Florissant, assistant state director of the Missouri Citizens Council.

In 1980, a new organization—the Coalition Against Domestic Violence—was founded in Missouri. Over the years the group would hire an executive director, Colleen Coble; work with shelters across the state; and lobby for measures to criminalize marital rape, change custody visitation law, enact a stalking bill and add new provisions to the Adult Abuse Act.

Early in 1981, the small group of women legislators in Missouri lost one member when Sen. Gwen Giles resigned to accept a new job as St. Louis city assessor. Chair of the Interstate Cooperation Committee, she had sponsored bills that included direct bank deposit of public assistance payments and compensation of personal-injury crime victims. Unsuccessful Senate sponsor of the ERA in 1980, she also worked that year with Rep. Billie Boykins, vice chair of the House Congressional Reapportionment Committee, to redraw district lines. She was co-chair of the Legislative Black Caucus.

Just as Giles was leaving, another woman legislator was coming to office. Rep. Earlene Burbes (R-South St. Louis County) won her seat in a special election; her campaign was managed by

fellow Republican Rep. Irene Treppner. Burbes' election was seen as representing a trend toward Republican takeover of suburban districts in large urban areas.

In the 1981 session, women legislators were successful in passing legislation on a variety of issues. Rep. DeVerne Calloway sponsored a House bill that raised the ceiling on school district purchases requiring competitive bidding. Rep. Gladys Marriott, chair of the House Retirement Committee, shepherded through the House five bills involving state employee retirement laws. Sen. Harriett Woods sponsored a Senate bill relating to Medicaid benefits.

And once again, abortion made its way onto the Assembly docket. A measure co-sponsored in the House by Rep. Judith O'Connor, was intended to permit welfare-funded abortions only when the mother's life was at stake. While this bill failed, an amendment with similar provisions was successfully added to a bill, sponsored by Sen. Harriett Woods, that permitted Medicaid benefits for low-income elderly people who received personal care services at home.

In 1981, a Jefferson City woman also took over for a two-year stint as executive secretary and executive director of the Missouri Democratic Party. Much earlier Jane Simmons had worked for the Democratic National Committee and the U.S. Senatorial Democratic Campaign Committee; more recently, she had served as legislative secretary for two state representatives, one from Neosho and the other from Kansas City.

Women legislators remained active in 1982, sponsoring a raft of new legislation. Rep. Marion Cairns, a three-term legislator, helped develop new child-care measures which became law. Though she was unsuccessful in this session, Rep. Sue Shear pressed ahead with her long-time goal of rewriting Missouri statutes that contained sex-based language or discriminated on the basis of sex. Rep. Kaye Steinmetz passed an emergency package of federal compliance legislation and changes to the state's child abuse, child-support enforcement and foster-care statutes.

Others handled different measures. Rep. Karen McCarthy sponsored legislation that defined a new system for collecting debts owed the state. Rep. Carole Roper Park developed a measure that provided for changes in the mental-health laws. Sen. Harriett Woods sponsored a bill to restructure the laws and

penalties related to drunk driving.

During the summer of 1982, Missouri Labor and Industrial Relations Department Director Paula V. Smith was in the news for working to revive a long-dormant group: the Missouri Commission on the Status of Women. Born in 1967, the commission was intended to conduct research on the legal status of women and their equality of opportunity. Rep. DeVerne Calloway sponsored a bill in the House that would have provided funding for the commission, but it was not enacted. So under its president, Alberta Meyer of Jefferson City, the commission worked without funds. In its early years, it made recommendations concerning equal pay for women and a minimum-wage law. The legislature finally appropriated \$10,000 for the commission's operation in 1973, then reduced yearly allotments—first to \$2,500 and then to zero—after the commission published a booklet on the ERA. The group fell into dormancy until Smith revived it, appointing new members to fill vacancies among its 15 slots. New chair was Kay Woomack of Washington, Governor Bond's campaign manager in Franklin County.

That summer, a ground-breaking political campaign was under way across the state as state Sen. Harriett Woods challenged the Republican incumbent, U.S. Sen. John Danforth, in the race for the United States Senate. She won overwhelmingly in the primary, defeating her opponent by some 123,000 votes. In the general election, she was considered a long shot, but her campaign attracted national attention. By October, some polls showed Woods and Danforth running neck-and-neck; on election day, Danforth won by 26,247 votes—only 1.7 percent of the total. Woods emerged from her narrow loss with enhanced stature in state and national politics.

Judicial elections sent women to the bench in 1982. Ellen Roper became the first woman elected to the state's circuit bench, when she won her race for the 13th judicial circuit court. A Republican, she had previously been appointed and later elected Boone County probate judge. She was also a former assistant attorney general and one-time director of the Missouri Human Rights Commission.

In legislative election battles, a new group of women emerged victorious: Democrats Gracia Y. Backer of New Bloomfield, Martha Foley Jarman of Excelsior Springs and Claire McCaskill of



Paula Smith



Irene Treppier



Karen McCarthy



Gracia Backer



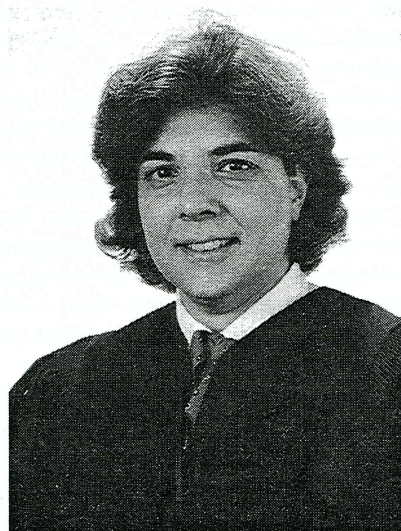
Pat Danner



Sandra Lee Reeves



Margaret Kelly



Edith Messina



Annette Morgan

Kansas City, an attorney who had been assistant Jackson County prosecutor, went to the House; Pat Danner, a Smithville Democrat, went to the Senate (just as her son, Rep. Steve Danner, was elected to the House). Republicans Laurie B. Donovan of Florissant, Mary C. Kasten of Cape Girardeau and Bonnie Sue Cooper of Kansas City were all elected to the House.

A new kind of woman was vying for political office, according to CAWP studies. Like many of their male colleagues, women officials often held graduate degrees, more than half of them in law. Some 28 percent belonged to groups such as the League of Women Voters or the AAUW and 40 percent to feminist organizations. One-half of state legislators reported that they had received some support from a women's group in their campaigns.

Women in the electorate were also taking a new interest in politics. Some analysts said they were savoring the 1982 election victories; others thought they were energized by the ERA debate. But all agreed that women—especially professional women—were becoming more politically active themselves, by joining political clubs, for example, and supporting other women's political campaigns. "I see a lot more women taking a front role in politics," said Jody Newman, Harriett Woods' campaign manager, in a newspaper interview, "doing less of the envelope licking and getting involved at a higher level."

During 1983, a survey of women attending a CAWP-sponsored National Forum for State Legislators indicated that the concerns of women in politics had also changed over the previous decade. In contrast to an earlier generation of women public officials, these legislators generally agreed that they had a special responsibility to their female constituents and that they should pay close attention to the issues affecting these women, especially to equal pay and comparable worth, children's concerns or the economic rights of older and divorced women.

With this new kind of consciousness on the part of politicians and the public, the time was right for women's political organizations to assume a higher profile. In 1983, a new group formed: the Missouri Women's Network, a consortium of women's groups that banded together to promote education and women's issues. Along with seminars and confer-

ences, they monitored state and national legislation in such areas as childcare, mammography, Medicaid expansion and domestic violence.

Existing groups, such as the AAUW, also worked toward political reform. Natalie Tackett, who had served as research analyst for the Missouri House since 1981, took over as president of the Missouri Division of the AAUW in 1983. During her term of office, the AAUW pressed for legislation in such areas as solid-waste management, comparable worth and state day-care licensing laws. Tackett, who had served on the steering committee for the Missouri ERA Coalition, would later work to develop the AAUW's national legislative program concerning women's work and women's worth; she would also become director of the State Oversight Division's Committee on Legislative Research.

Women legislators also promoted new measures during the 1983 session. Rep. Sandra Lee Reeves (D-Kansas City) sponsored a bill, which sparked extensive debate before it passed, requiring children under the age of four to be protected by child-restraint systems. Sen. Harriett Woods introduced a comprehensive revision of the Missouri statutes related to guardianship of the elderly, the developmentally disabled and the mildly retarded.

Since 1984 was an election year, women were once again on the campaign trail nationally, with Geraldine Ferraro heading the roster as a vice-presidential candidate. A record number—ten women in all—ran for seats in the U.S. Senate. When the election returns came in, though, Ferraro and nine of the would-be senators had lost; only one, Nancy Kassebaum, a Kansas Republican, was elected.

Republican women generally fared well in Missouri, too. Irene Treppler, a six-term representative and Republican Caucus secretary in the House, won election to the state Senate; Republicans Jan Martinette of Grandview and Joan Tobin of Lake St. Louis were elected as state representatives. However, Carrie Francke, a Republican and assistant attorney general who formerly worked for Sen. John Danforth, lost her race for the 9th district congressional seat held by Rep. Harold Volkmer; she lost another political bid in 1986 before she was killed in an automobile accident in 1989.

Margaret Kelly, a Republican, became the first woman to hold statewide office

when she was sworn in as state auditor on July 16, 1984. Kelly, a certified public accountant and Cole County auditor since 1982, was appointed by Governor Christopher Bond; she went on to win election in her own right in 1986 and again in 1990.

In the lop-sided 1984 election, only one Democrat won a major victory. Sen. Harriett Woods became the first Missouri woman elected to statewide office when she easily captured the position of lieutenant governor. During her term of office, she would conduct hearings around the state to seek input on how the state could help small businesses; her office set up a telephone line, "Statewide Volunteers for Efficiency (SAVE)," which state workers could call with reports of waste or inefficiency.

Women participated in the election in other ways as well. The League of Women Voters sponsored a 1984 presidential debate in Kansas City between President Ronald Reagan and Vice President Walter Mondale. Barbara Bailey, president of the Kansas City League, chaired the arrangements.

Rep. Jean H. Mathews was honored as one of two outstanding state legislators in 1984 by the American Legislative Exchange Council in recognition, among other things, for her efforts to toughen laws against drunk drivers, to end court-ordered busing to achieve school integration and to crack down on those who use children in pornography.

Late in 1984, Rep. Betty Hearnese, chair of the Correctional Institutions and Problems Committee, made a strong bid but failed to win election as the first female majority floor leader of the Missouri House.

Some key legislation, sponsored by women, sprang out of the 1985 session. Rep. Gladys Marriott continued her work of clarifying and revising state health insurance and retirement benefits. Rep. Karen McCarthy proposed legislation to change the statutes governing compensation to crime victims. With state officials trying to attract a General Motors plant to Missouri, Rep. Judith O'Connor handled mandatory seat-belt legislation, a major incentive in wooing the plant. Rep. Kaye Steinmetz initiated a comprehensive act designed to revise the statutes relating to termination of parental rights and adoption.

Another bill, sponsored by Rep. Judith O'Connor, sparked a wave of controversy in the House. The measure was de-

signed to protect anti-abortion activists; however, critics charged that it could result in the state condoning acts of violence, such as arson or assault, if the person involved believed the crime was necessary to save a human life. When the House Judiciary Committee would not hold a hearing on the bill, the Speaker of the House took the unusual step of transferring it to a committee, Civil and Criminal Justice, where it would get a hearing.

Also in 1984, Edith L. Messina was appointed the first woman circuit judge in Jackson County. She was retained by 16th circuit voters in 1992.

In March 1985, the Missouri Commission on the Status of Women was back in the news again. After its brief period of new life in 1982, the 18-year-old commission had fallen once again into dormancy. With the help of two tie-breaking votes cast by Lt. Gov. Harriett Woods, the Senate decided to replace the commission with a new body, the Council on Women's Economic Development and Training, designed to help retrain women to enter the workforce, promote occupational mobility among women in lower- and middle-level jobs and initiate programs to help women in small business.

Two widows were named to fill the House seats of their late husbands, who had died within months of each other. The 14th Legislative Democratic Committee chose Lois Meeker Osbourn, a Democrat of Hannibal, to finish the term of Rep. D.R. "Ozzie" Osbourn, and Mildred "Millie" Humphreys, a Democrat of St. Joseph, was named to replace Rep. Roy Humphreys Jr.

At the start of 1986, newspaper articles headlined the growing political influence of women in the state, even though the number of women serving in the state legislature—28 in the House and two in the Senate—was still below average, placing the state 28th nationally. While 14.2 percent of Missouri's legislature was composed of women, Kansas had 18.2 percent and New Hampshire 33 percent; the national average was 15 percent.

But Missouri women had been handling important issues and committee assignments, with growing respect from their male colleagues. Rep. Betty Hearnese had played a critical role in prison issues. Rep. Karen McCarthy, chair of the influential House Ways and Means Committee, had been an impor-

tant voice in shaping the state lottery, while Rep. Annette Morgan, chair of the House Education Committee, was influential in deciding how much money would be spent on public schools. Rep. Carole Roper Park, chair of the budget committee that studied state financing for mental health, had been a key player in a \$600 million capital improvements bond issue. Rep. Kaye Steinmetz, head of the House Children, Youth and Families Committee, had built a reputation as the legislature's leading advocate of children's services.

And other women headed important committees. Rep. Winnie Weber chaired the House Higher Education Committee, while Sen. Pat Danner headed the Senate Transportation Committee and served as vice chair of the Senate Education Committee.

In the 1986 session, Rep. Claire McCaskill successfully sponsored a House bill covering tougher standards for paroling state prison inmates. Rep. Mary Groves Bland passed a bill designating the third Monday in January as Martin Luther King Day.

But the most emotionally charged issue on the legislative docket was a major abortion-related bill, which finally became law. Under the measure, public funds and facilities could not be used for abortions. The bill said that life begins at conception and that unborn children have full legal rights. Further, it required doctors, before performing abortions, to test the viability of fetuses at 20 or more weeks gestation.

This bill first passed the House by a vote of 124-27, after Rep. Laurie Donovan described her successful attempt to have a healthy child after two stillbirths, despite her doctor's advice to have an abortion. Rep. Sheila Lumpe and Rep. Sue Shear spoke strongly against the bill, calling it unconstitutional and charging that it discriminated against the poor. The measure won quick approval, 23-5, in the Senate; Gov. John Ashcroft signed it into law, despite an unusual ten-page protest, signed by Reps. Lumpe, Shear, Martha Jarman, Karen McCarthy and Annette Morgan.

In 1986, Missouri sent a former state cabinet member to Washington, D.C. Paula V. Smith, who had served as director of the Missouri State Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, was named administrator of the Wage and Hour Division of the United States Department of Labor, which enforces

federal wage and hour laws under the Fair Labor Standards Act.

That fall, Rep. Sue Shear, honored a few months earlier by the Great Lakes Region of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, was named to head an interim House committee to study laws relating to the rights of people sent involuntarily to state hospitals or mental institutions; Rep. Gracia Y. Backer, who had sponsored a bill in the previous session related to mental health records, was on the committee, as was Rep. Marion Cairns.

In the 1986 elections, more than 1,800 women ran for state legislatures nationwide and 57 women ran for the five top statewide executive posts. In Missouri, several new legislators were elected, among them: Reps. Opal W. Parks (D-Caruthersville), Mary M. Hagan-Harrell (D-Ferguson), Paula Carter (D-St. Louis), Sandra D. Kauffman (R-Kansas City), Jacqueline Townes McGee (D-Kansas City) and Beth Wheeler (D-Trenton).

But the most bitterly fought race of all was the battle between Lt. Gov. Harriett Woods and former Gov. Christopher Bond for a seat in the U.S. Senate. On television, in debates co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters and the media, and in appearances across the state, the two candidates sparred on a variety of issues: Woods supported a temporary freeze on farm foreclosures, while Bond opposed it; Woods said Congress should work toward balancing the budget, but Bond wanted a constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget; Woods called abortion a matter of personal choice, while Bond supported a constitutional amendment allowing states to ban or regulate abortions. Finally, Bond won election with 53 percent of the vote.

This trend toward more women in political life continued into 1987, with women holding 15.6 percent of state legislative seats. CAWP figures also showed that women occupied 14.6 percent of top elective statewide executive offices. And women, though still under-represented in state cabinets, were heading departments that were not traditionally considered "women's areas."

The public perception of female candidates was changing, too. A survey of 1,502 voters, reported by the National Women's Political Caucus, showed that 57 percent believed a woman could do as well as—or better than—a man as

president of the United States. And 70 percent shared that same belief about a woman governor.

But in many states, including Missouri, the state laws related to women's rights in such areas as divorce and custody, domestic violence, inheritance, abortion, equal pay, and fair employment, credit and insurance, were said to be far from adequate. In a survey sponsored by the National Organization for Women's Legal Defense and Education Fund, Missouri ranked 29th, despite some forward-looking laws in the area of child support and employment. And a study by the Missouri Women's Council showed that four out of five Missouri women surveyed had faced major barriers—family responsibilities, lack of education, sex bias or inadequate benefits—in finding jobs and advancing in their careers.

Nonetheless, women continued to carve out a larger niche in government. Rep. Kaye Steinmetz was appointed co-chair of the Children, Youth and Families Task Force of the National Conference of State Legislatures. Rep. Annette Morgan received an award from the Committee on Parents as Teachers, a state-funded program originally sponsored by Rep. Sue Shear, which offers parenting information to families with children from birth to school age and provides informal early screening. Rep. Mary C. Kasten was also a member of the statewide committee for the Parents as Teachers program.

And in March, Rep. Betty Hearnese assumed the chairmanship of the state's Democratic Party, at a time when both U.S. Senate seats and five of the state's top six offices were held by Republicans.

During the legislative session, these women and others continued to sponsor a raft of new measures. Rep. Gracia Y. Backer introduced a House bill that gave state employees who were adoptive parents the right to sick leave, annual leave or leave without pay. Rep. Judith O'Connor defined and established punishments for computer crimes. Sen. Irene Treppner passed a bill that forbade the explicit advertising of bingo games.

Wading once again into the abortion fray, Rep. Sue Shear sponsored a measure that would allow Medicaid payments to be used for abortions needed by women who become pregnant as a result of rape or incest. The bill, supported by Missouri National Abortion Rights Action League and

opposed by Missouri Citizens for Life, died in committee.

A female legislator became the first to give birth while in office. Rep. Claire McCaskill, who was handling legislation related to children's day care and maternity leave, had a son in September 1987.

And another well-known figure in Missouri politics died that year: Lenore Loeb of St. Louis, immediate past president of the League of Women Voters. She joined the League in 1957 and became a state board member in 1974, serving at various times as director of land use, energy, development and action.

Other League members were also achieving prominence on a variety of issues. Esther Lee Joyner Myers, former president of the Kansas City League, had a special interest in water policy, while Carolyn Leuthold, former president of the Columbia-Boone County Chapter, concentrated on housing, health studies and voter service. Other League members with a growing role in the organization included: Winfred Colwill, active in the area of energy issues; Betty Woodruff in environmental quality; and Betty Wilson in water resources, environmental quality, and hazardous and solid waste.

The year 1988 began with an announcement that a woman would be a candidate for Missouri governor. Betty Cooper Hearnese took on incumbent governor John Ashcroft in the race. She campaigned on a platform of increased aid to education, relief for prison overcrowding and support for the state's mental health system. Ashcroft was re-elected with 64 percent of the vote.

On the legislative side, only a few new women won office, among them Kathleen Steele (D-Kirksville), Jean Dixon (R-Springfield) and Carol Jean Mays (D-Independence).

Meanwhile, though, women legislators had been having an especially busy session. A 1988 CAWP study had shown that three times more women legislators than men had a priority bill aimed at concerns of women constituents; they were also more likely to sponsor bills dealing with children's welfare and health care.

In many of the bills they sponsored, Missouri women reflected this trend. Rep. Gracia Backer established the Missouri Commission for the Deaf. A bill from Rep. Mary Groves Bland set up an Office of Minority Health, while Rep.

Paula Carter tackled voter registration issues. Rep. Sheila Lumpe passed a bill aimed at recruiting people who would act as surrogate parents for handicapped children, while Rep. Gladys Marriott worked on retirement issues. Rep. Claire McCaskill revised the manner of funding crime victims' compensation. A bill from Rep. Judith O'Connor prohibited physicians from performing abortions that were intended to provide fetal organs or tissue for medical transplantation. Rep. Sue Shear took on mental health issues. Once again Rep. Kaye Steinmetz worked on statutes dealing with property, child support and child custody in divorce cases.

On the judicial side, 1988 was also a banner year, as Judge Jean Hamilton, who had served as a St. Louis circuit court judge since 1982, was sworn in as a judge on the Missouri Court of Appeals, Eastern District. And in a signal achievement, Ann Kettering Covington, who had been appointed in 1987 the state's first woman appellate judge as a member of the Missouri Court of Appeals, Western District, was named the first woman judge on the Missouri Supreme Court.

In mid-1989, the U.S. Supreme Court took action that further inflamed the abortion debate, when it upheld key provisions of Missouri's 1986 abortion law in its *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* ruling, which gave states the right to exercise broad authority in regulating abortion. Pro-life women in the legislature were elated; others admitted that pro-choice forces were a minority in the legislature and could not defeat new measures limiting abortion.

As the decade ended, women had reached many milestones, and women's organizations had arisen to support them. Nationally, at least 35 political action committees gave money mostly to female candidates or had a largely female donor base. In a report to CAWP, 17 PACs said they gave more than \$1.1 million to 464 female candidates in the 1988 elections.

In Missouri, the Women's Political Caucus was targeting, training and supporting promising women candidates. The National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) and Missouri Alliance for Choice were actively supporting pro-choice candidates and legislation, while the Missouri Citizens for Life, a pro-life group, was supporting candidates who opposed abortion.

And the Women's Action Fund,

founded in Missouri in 1988 by Marcia Mellitz, Vivian Eveloff, Marcia Kerz and Julia Muller, was a new political action committee in the state and the only one qualified for federal funding. Its membership, based largely in St. Louis, voted to determine which candidates statewide to support; their choices were "socially progressive" on such issues as abortion, child care, housing and education.

A well-known figure in the state died in 1989. Ella B. Stackhouse, a 1944 Lincoln University graduate, became the first African-American woman hired by the state as an extension home economist. During her active career in two Bootheel counties she served as mentor to many young people; she also founded the Negro Home Economics Scholarship Fund. Later she worked in the Kansas City area as a volunteer in the crusade against hunger.

By the end of the decade, several of the groups established before the 1970s were also looking for new ways to support women. The Missouri Extension Homemakers Association, Inc., a group founded in 1936 and representing today more than 8,000 women statewide, introduced in 1989 a program called Family Community Leadership (FCL). This program, co-chaired by former MEHA state president Betty Reynolds of Anderson, was aimed at increasing the leadership capacities of those women not traditionally represented in the public decision-making process. Three years later, the organization would change its name to Missouri Association for Family and Community Education to reflect its new goals.

Despite this growing support, the Missouri legislature still had only 27 women as representatives and two as senators, among a sea of men. In a 1989 speech, Sen. Irene Treppier asked the key question: "Why are we, as public officials, still such a rare phenomenon, almost 70 years after the passage of the 19th Amendment? . . . Our share of political power is small."

The 1990s

A Surge in Political Power

The new decade began in Missouri with an old, divisive issue: abortion. In January, a group of pro-choice supporters led by Judith Widdicombe, founder and president of Reproductive Health Services, a St. Louis-based

abortion clinic, launched a petition drive for a constitutional amendment that would nullify the state's controversial 1986 law. Not long afterward, Rep. Sue Shear also proposed a bill to make sections of the 1986 law illegal.

Pro-life forces in the legislature countered with bills to prohibit or restrict abortions, including an amendment by Rep. Judith O'Connor that would prevent school nurses from referring students to organizations that offered abortions. Though the House passed this amendment, it died in the Senate, along with the education bill, sponsored by Rep. Annette Morgan, to which it was attached.

In the 1990 election, abortion was again an issue, with pro-choice forces claiming some victories in legislative races: Reps. Connie Wible (R-Springfield), May Scheve (D-St. Louis), Jo Ann Karll (D-High Ridge). Pro-life forces took credit for defeating Jan Martinette (R-Kansas City). Other representatives elected were Emmy L. McClelland (R-Webster Groves) and Patricia Secrest (R-Manchester). Beth Long (R-Lebanon), who had gone to the House in a special February election, was also re-elected.

A face-off between Joan Kelly Horn and incumbent Jack Buechner (R-Kirkwood) for a 2nd district congressional seat proved the most dramatic race of 1990. A pro-choice candidate, Horn also stressed her intention to focus on issues related to the St. Louis area. After a hard-fought campaign, Horn won by a razor-thin 54 votes.

Judge Jean Hamilton, then a state appeals judge in St. Louis, was also back in the news. In 1990, she became the first woman to serve as a federal district judge in Missouri when she was named to the Eastern District in St. Louis.

In the same year, Rep. Jean Dixon garnered national news coverage for her sponsorship of a House bill, which failed to pass, that required labeling on some audio recordings and restricting the attendance of minors to certain live performances.

Some women were successful, but national figures for 1991 showed that women still held few positions of power. Of 50 state governors, three were women; there were six lieutenant governors, four attorneys general; ten secretaries of state and 14 state treasurers. While making up only about six percent of the U.S. Congress, women accounted for a more impressive 18 percent of state

legislators. Missouri ranked 28th overall in the number of female state legislators: two women in the Senate and 29 in the House, including 21 Democrats and eight Republicans. One newcomer was Marilyn Taylor Williams (D-Dudley), who won office in a special election.

By 1992, a survey by the National Women's Political Caucus was showing an unprecedented rise in the number of women cabinet officials, to a substantial 23.3 percent. But the same survey ranked the administration of Gov. John Ashcroft as third from the bottom in the number of women appointees. Donna White, former administrative law judge from St. Louis who had been named state director of Labor and Industrial Relations in 1989, was the only woman among Ashcroft's 11 cabinet officers.

In June 1992, the Missouri Women's Council, in conjunction with the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor, sponsored a regional round-table discussion for women cabinet members, elected officials and legislators to discuss women's participation in public service. While those attending described some "facilitating factors," such as support from family and colleagues, they also pinpointed some barriers to service, such as the "good-old-boy network," a lack of self-confidence, prevailing sexual stereotypes and the difficulties of juggling family and work. Yet overall, their advice to women considering a public service career was to "go for it; be a risk-taker."

As the August primary races got under way, it became clear that more women than ever were taking that risk and seeking nominations for public office. A record number of Missouri women—90 in all—ran for statewide, congressional or legislative positions.

When the dust had settled from the primaries, it appeared that 1992 might really be the "Year of the Woman" in Missouri. From a crowded field of 14 contenders, Geri Rothman-Serot, St. Louis County councilwoman, won the U.S. Senate nomination. Although Judith K. Moriarty, Pettis County clerk, spent only \$16,000 on the contest, far less than her three opponents, she captured the Democratic nomination for secretary of state. Margaret B. Kelly, state auditor, won the Republican nomination for lieutenant governor, while Mary Ross, St. Louis alderman, came in a creditable second for the Democratic nomination. And former state Sen. Pat Danner



Mary Groves Bland



Ann Kettering Covington



Judith Moriarty



Ellen Roper



Claire McCaskill



Coleen Kivlahan



Janette Lohman



Dora Schriro



Anita Gorman

garnered the Democratic nomination for the 6th district congressional seat.

On the legislative side, Rep. Betty Hearnese overwhelmed two other candidates for a state Senate nomination. Sen. Irene Treppner fended off a challenge from a well-known legislator. Political newcomers Nancy Farmer and Joan Bray both defeated long-time incumbents to win Democratic nominations for state representative. Because of redistricting, male and female incumbents had squared off in two races, and Reps. Mary Hagan-Harrell (D-Ferguson) and Carol Jean Mays (D-Independence) both won.

Surprising victories were taking place on the local level as well. Out of a field of seven candidates, all the rest male, Dee Joyce Hayes won the Democratic nomination for St. Louis circuit attorney; in Kansas City, former state Rep. Claire McCaskill also won the Democratic nomination for prosecuting attorney.

When the November 1992 election results came in, they showed many successes. Judith K. Moriarty, a Democrat who had served for ten years as Pettis County clerk, was elected Missouri's 34th secretary of state, the first woman ever elected to the office and only the third woman elected to statewide office in Missouri.

Pat Danner, a ten-year veteran of the Missouri legislature who chaired the Senate transportation committee, defeated her Republican rival by a 55-to-45 percent margin in the 6th district congressional race, making Danner the only Missouri woman currently on Capitol Hill. Prior to serving in the legislature, Ms. Danner was appointed chair of the Ozark Regional Planning Commission by President Jimmy Carter.

But there were also some key losses. Geri Rothman-Serot was defeated by incumbent Christopher Bond for the seat in the U.S. Senate. State Sen. Roger Wilson won against Margaret Kelly to become the state's new lieutenant governor; however, Kelly remained in office as state auditor, becoming the only Republican to hold statewide office.

Another stinging defeat for a woman candidate came in the race for U.S. Congress between incumbent Rep. Joan Kelly Horn, a Democrat, and former state Rep. James M. Talent, a Republican. During her term in office, Horn had worked to protect St. Louis jobs and to win approval for a new study of an extension of the area's new light-rail line. In the election, which took place in a

newly redrawn 2nd district, she lost by a slender 50-to-48 percent margin.

The issue of abortion played a role in certain elections. In the race for state representative in the 84th district, Democratic candidate Joan Bray, who had worked as a district director for U.S. Rep. Joan Kelly Horn, ran as a strong pro-choice advocate. Her opponent, James N. Riley, had served as a state representative since 1972; he had co-sponsored a bill aimed at providing a pregnant woman with prenatal care and counseling that might encourage her not to have an abortion. In the November election, Bray was the surprise victor.

Nationally, the results of this election meant a larger role for women in politics than ever before. Aided in some cases by Emily's List for Democratic Women, the bipartisan Women's Campaign Fund or the National Women's Political Caucus, they won 20.4 percent of legislative seats nationwide and 22 percent of statewide elective offices.

In Missouri, appointments by newly elected Governor Mel Carnahan also boosted the role of women. Of the 190 appointments he made, 65 were women. Four were chosen to head state departments: Coleen Kivlahan, M.D., Health; Janette M. Lohman, Revenue; Jeanette R. McCrary, Labor and Industrial Relations; Dora B. Schriro, Corrections. Schriro is the first woman to head the Missouri prison system and one of only six women to do so nationwide.

There were other 1993 milestones. In July, Judge Ann K. Covington began a two-year term as chief justice of the Missouri Supreme Court. She is the first woman ever to head the seven-member court. Justine Del Muro, appointed in July, became the first Hispanic woman to serve as circuit judge. And in August, Anita Gorman, Kansas City, North, became the first woman to serve on the four-member Missouri Conservation Commission.

And a crop of 11 new female legislators arrived in Jefferson City for the start of the 1993 legislative session: Reps. Joan Bray (D-University City), Harriet Brown (R-Wentzville), Norma Champion (R-Springfield), Nancy Farmer (D-St. Louis), Ilene Ordower (D-St. Louis), Cindy Ostmann (R-St. Peters), Jan Polizzi (D-St. Louis), Luann Ridgeway (R-Smithville), Mary Lou Sallee (R-Ava), Gloria Weber (D-St. Louis) and Deleta Williams (D-Warrensburg).

As they had in the past, these women

continued to break new ground both in the committees they headed and in the legislation they passed. Rep. Gracia Backer sponsored a bill to increase pensions for state employees; Rep. Karen McCarthy helped establish a gambling commission to monitor the new riverboat gambling law. Rep. Annette Morgan co-sponsored a school-aid bill that will have a major impact on school financing. Rep. Carole Roper Park helped save funding for the Department of Mental Health. Rep. Sue Shear worked to extend insurance coverage for homemakers who are suddenly widowed or divorced, while Rep. Kathleen Steele handled a complex bill making changes in insurance laws. After years of effort, Rep. Kaye Steinmetz passed three bills aimed at helping families, and Sen. Irene Treppner helped create a 17-member earthquake-preparedness commission.

In 1993 and beyond, much work remains to be done. There is still only one Missouri woman in the state Senate and one in the U.S. Congress. No Missouri woman has ever been a U.S. senator or Missouri governor, and 30 of the state's 44 judicial circuits have no women judges. In its 1993 Women's Action Plan, originated by chair Shirley Breeze of St. Louis County, the Missouri Women's Network pointed to urgent legislative needs that still exist in a dozen key areas affecting women and their families.

On the other hand, the 11 female legislators who were serving in 1972 have increased to 37 women—a record high. On the judicial side, nearly 8 percent of the 342 judges in the Missouri judiciary are now women, including one each on the Court of Appeals in Kansas City and St. Louis and one on the Supreme Court.

And as they have in the past, women continue to raise important issues and work for change. In 1993, for example, the AAUW, the League of Women Voters and the Missouri Women's Network held "legislative days" in the Capitol, an event which they have sponsored for several years. They first held a breakfast for all General Assembly members, then reviewed organizational priorities and strategies, invited women legislators for lunch and discussion of issues and later promoted the groups' issue priorities with hometown legislators and key House and Senate chairs and leaders.

Other organizations are celebrating years of success in meeting their goals and attracting new members. In July 1994, the 75th anniversary of the National

Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs will be marked in St. Louis. From its small start, the organization has grown to 85 local chapters and 2,300 members.

From their small start years ago, Missouri women in political life have also grown in number—and they continue to make a difference. In an interview that

took place more than two decades ago, Congresswoman Leonor K. Sullivan outlined the role of women in politics, and the role she described remains just as vital today. Women, she said, can make a key contribution to political life by raising issues that are crucial to women and families. More generally, they can join with their male colleagues in shaping

political debate and forging critical legislation.

And each woman in politics—like every good politician—must always keep in view a mission that can never be diluted or forgotten. “In today’s world,” added Congresswoman Sullivan, “she has a real responsibility to help make a better place for all of us.”

Missouri Women in Politics: A Timeline

- 1890—Annie W. Baxter, Jasper County Clerk, first Missouri woman elected to office.
- 1919—National Federation of Business and Professional Women founded in St. Louis.
- 1920—Marie Byrum, Hannibal, first woman to vote in Missouri.
- 1921—Mayme Ousley, St. James, first woman elected mayor in Missouri.
- 1922—Mellcene Smith and Sarah Turner, first women elected to the Missouri House.
- 1933—Nellie Ross, appointed director of the U.S. Mint by President Truman.
- 1934—Gladys Stewart, Springfield, elected to the Missouri House.
- 1942—Mayce Maness, first woman elected as a county prosecuting attorney.
- 1952—Leonor K. Sullivan, first woman member of the Missouri Senate.
- 1961—Agnes I. Moore, first woman to serve as Chief Clerk of the House.
- 1972—The Missouri Women's Caucus founded in St. Louis.
- 1972—Mary Gant, first woman elected to the Missouri Senate.
- 1976—Rosemary Ginn, Columbia, first woman named to an ambassador's post.
- 1984—Margaret Kelly, state auditor, first woman appointed to a statewide office.
- 1984—Harriett Woods, lieutenant governor, first woman elected to a statewide post.
- 1992—Judith K. Moriarty, elected Missouri's first woman secretary of state.
- 1993—37 women served in the Missouri Legislature.
- 1994—65 women appointed to state posts by Governor Mel Carnahan.

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